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Medical Examiner wants to bury Ricky Holland's remains

March 27, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The Ingham County Medical Examiner wants a probate judge to allow for the burial of the remains of Ricky Holland, the 7-year-old who was killed by his adoptive parents in July 2005.

The remains, mostly skeletal, have been stored in a laboratory at Michigan State University's Department of Anthropology since they were recovered on Jan. 27, 2005, in a swamp south of Dansville. His parents Tim and Lisa Holland are in prison after being convicted of murder in his death.

Chief Ingham County Probate Court Judge George Economy will hold a hearing Wednesday afternoon on the request from Medical Examiner Dean Sienko to terminate any rights the Hollands may have to their son's remains and to allow Sienko to make funeral arrangements.

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Ricky may soon be buried -- finally

March 28, 2007

Authorities finally are moving to clear the way for a proper burial for 7-year-old Ricky Holland, whose skeletal remains have been kept for 14 months in a Michigan State University laboratory while his parents were charged with and convicted of his murder.

"It's time to put that poor child to rest once and for all," said Robin Walling of Jackson County, who knew Ricky.

Ingham County Chief Probate Judge George Economy will hear a petition today filed by the county medical examiner, Dr. Dean Sienko, to clear the legal obstacles to burial. The eight-page petition seeks to terminate all inheritance rights of Ricky's adoptive parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, and of his grandparents, aunts and uncles, biological mother and paternal half-sister.

Ingham County Prosecutor Stuart Dunning III said a free burial site and funeral services have been offered.

By Jack Kresnak

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March 28, 2007

Authorities to seek right to bury Ricky

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

Almost two years after his murder, 7-year-old Ricky Holland may finally be laid to rest. But it could be Ingham County authorities -- not relatives -- who bury him.

Medical Examiner Dean Sienko today will ask the county's Probate Court for the right to bury the child, releasing him from a morgue where his body has remained since it was recovered from an icy swamp near Dansville in January 2006.

Sienko wants Chief Probate Judge George Economy to rule that none of Ricky's adoptive relatives has a claim to the boy, who was murdered in July 2005 by his adoptive parents, Tim and Lisa Holland of Williamston.

Lisa Holland was sentenced to life in prison in November for bludgeoning Ricky to death with a hammer. Tim Holland confessed to second-degree murder and is serving 30-60 years.

"Typically, (burial rights) would go to a next of kin," Sienko said. "In this case, none of the family members should be granted disposition rights."

The body is in legal limbo, unable to be buried, because it was considered evidence against Ricky's parents. The state pays up to \$909 for burials, but friends and relatives can supplement that figure to \$2,600, said Maureen Sorbet, spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services.

Ingham County Detective Lt. Roy Holliday, the lead investigator, said he will attend the funeral. He was there when Tim Holland led detectives to Ricky's body.

"I've made my peace with it, but there are probably many in the community that have not," Holliday said. A funeral "would be a good way to put it to rest for final closure."

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

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Lansing State Journal

March 28, 2007

Decision on Ricky's burial pending

An Ingham County probate judge is expected to decide today what should happen with the remains of slain 7-year-old Ricky Holland.

Ingham County Medical Examiner Dean Sienko petitioned Judge George Economy for permission to make decisions about funeral arrangements and the handling of Ricky's skeletal remains. Ricky's parents, Tim and Lisa Holland, were sentenced for murder last year his July 2005 death.

Normally, the responsibility for burying a child would go to the parents, but they're incarcerated, and Ricky's siblings are younger than 18. Another problem is Ricky's autopsy. Medical examiners were unable to determine his cause of death, and prosecutors want to preserve the remains' evidentiary value in case further charges are brought.

- From staff reports



03/27/2007

Mother gets prison time for injuring baby

STACY LANGLEY , The Huron Daily Tribune

BAD AXE — A year in the county jail is the sentence that would have been handed down Monday in Huron County Circuit Court for the Bad Axe woman who nearly killed her 28-day-old baby in February 2006 when she threw the child fracturing his skull, ribs and clavicle and causing bleeding on the brain.

But Huron County Circuit Court Judge M. Richard Knoblock warned Stardust L. Welshans attorney James Woodworth early on in the sentencing proceeding Monday afternoon that he wasn't considering jail time — prison is where his client would be heading.

Welshans sat whispering "I love you," to her husband Ryan as he prepared for sentencing for his part in the couple's abuse of the baby.

In a plea agreement between Ryan Welshans and the Huron County Prosecutor's Office he agreed to pled to two felony charges of obstruction of justice and accessory after the fact for his involvement.

Ryan Welshans attorney David B. Herrington spoke of his client's love for his two children, an older son and the baby that was injured in February 2006.

"Mr. Welshans lacks judgment," said Herrington who went on to mention that his client was "manipulated and controlled by his spouse...he plans to divorce his spouse."

Herrington said it was Mrs. Welshans committed the underlying crimes of child abuse.

"Its inconceivable that she would do what she did with the child," Herrington said.

Knoblock spoke up reminding that Ryan Welshans too played a part in what happened.

"He knew she did it and then he committed these offenses (lying to police, covering up for what Stardust Welshans did to the baby.)

When given a chance to address the court Ryan Welshans said "if I could go back in time I would. I've learned from my mistakes."

Huron County Prosecutor Mark J. Gaertner reminded the court before Ryan was sentenced that it took a year before Ryan Welshans finally coming clean with detectives about what really happened to the 28-day-old baby causing his injuries.

"It took over a year for my office and sheriff's deputies we spent countless hours to know what the truth really was, what really happened," said Gaertner. Knoblock said typically the victim too would have a chance to speak but the child was just 28-days old at the time.

"Its incredible that anyone could treat an infant that way," said Knoblock. "A poor little 28-day-old infant has to suffer as a result of you two people. You're his parents."

Knoblock said since Ryan Welshans was not the perpetrator that it lessen his responsibility and he followed the state's sentencing guidelines giving Welshans 365 days in jail on each of the charges (obstruction of justice and accessory after the fact). Time that will be served concurrently.

Ryan Welshans has 294 days credit for time already served in the county jail as he awaited his sentence. Time that will come off of the 365 days jail term.

In addition to jail time Knoblock ordered him to spend four years on probation. Terms of his probation include that he must continue to register as a sex offender (for an unrelated offense), he may not use or possess drugs or alcohol, he must undergo mental health treatment and to have no contact with his wife.

When Knoblock mentioned Ryan is to have no contact with his wife, Stardust Welshans got up out of her seat in the courtroom and stormed out.

When she returned for her sentence Ryan Welshans had already been taken back to the Huron County Jail.

Stardust Welshans with her attorney stood before Knoblock as he read the felony charge of assault with intent to do great bodily harm less than

murder. A charge Stardust pled guilty to in early February admitting to the court she became frustrated with her youngest son and threw him on to the bed. The child struck the wall then the floor.

Woodworth told the court that he listened to Herrington's description of his client and it was "disingenuous to blame" Stardust. Ryan Welshans is the one who "wanted only girls," said Woodworth who told the court Ryan Welshans twisted the testicles of the infant causing injuries noted by doctors.

"I've spent a lot of time with Stardust. She acts like a child — she's a child," said Woodworth. "Her whole focus here today is her relationship with Ryan. The big problem is when they are together they don't mix."

Woodworth described the couple as having a third personality and that they become very dangerous to their own children when they are together.

"As long as the couple is separated they are not dangerous," he said attempting to persuade Knoblock from sending his client who has documented mental health issues to prison. "The county jail will do a better service to her."

When Knoblock gave Stardust a chance to address the court she pointed out her husband's attempts throughout the investigation to control who she could communicate with. She then blurted out. "Oh and I'm very sorry for what happened to my son."

Gaertner told the court for 14-months he along with detectives from the Huron County Sheriff's Office "lived and breathed this case."

"Myself and Det./sgt. Ron Roberts prepared ourselves for a homicide investigation. But for the grace of God this child survived. It is simply a miracle the child is still alive."

Department of Human Service Casework Monica Siegfried attended the sentencing she was called to address the court about the concerns DHS's had about placement of the couple's two children with Stardust before the youngest child was injured.

"She was deemed mentally unstable and her behavior placed the children at risk," said Siegfried referring finding by the department.

When probed by Knoblock Siegfried referred to an instance in which Stardust Welshans reportedly called 9-1-1 threatening to throw her oldest son out the window if the child didn't stop crying.

Siegfried then returned to her seat as Knoblock began to read off many of the severe injuries doctors from Hurley Hospital in Flint recorded the child sustained which included multiple fractures occurring at different times not just from the early February incident.

"All of this as a result of vicious treatment by his mother," said Knoblock. "She knows it's wrong. She's got a mind that knows what right and wrong are." Knoblock said he was deeply disappointed with the state's guidelines and how they tie the judge's hands in many cases.

"The problem with trying to use a formula to sentence is facts vary from case to case," said Knoblock who mentioned that due to a lack of a criminal record for Stardust Welshans the state's guidelines recommends only a year in jail.

"She came within an inch of killing this child," said Knoblock just one reason why he felt he need to deviate from the guidelines and hand down a much more stiff penalty. "No way in good conscious I can sentence her to probation and jail time. I've struggled with this I've been reading it for a week now. How am I going to sentence her to a year in jail. I think the guidelines miss the point. I'm not going to follow the guidelines. There are substantial reasons to exceed them.

Knoblock ordered Stardust Welshans to spend a minimum of two and a half years in prison and a maximum of 10 years. She was given 215 days credit for time already served. Knoblock also recommended she undergo mental health treatment while in prison.

The Department of Human Services began dealing with Ryan and Stardust Welshans in February of 2005, shortly after the birth of the couple's first child.

That child was taken out of the couple's care and placed by DHS into a foster home while both parents were ordered by the court to work on parenting issues.

In December of 2005 court records indicate the married couple separated from each other with Ryan Welshans living in the couple's home and Stardust Welshans moving in with her biological parents in the city of Bad Axe. During the couple's separation they both had visitation rights to their then 1-year-old child.

When DHS became aware a second child was born (he was born on Jan. 9, 2006) a hearing was called to determine placement of the newborn. At that time it was determined Ryan Welshans had made progress in the efforts set forth for him by the court and DHS, and the newborn would go home to live with him.

DHS was notified on Feb. 6, 2006 by Det./Sgt. Ron Roberts of the Huron County Sheriff's Office, about the youngest baby's severe head injuries and hospitalization on Feb. 5 at Hurley Medical Center in Flint. The incident came to light after Ryan Welshans called 9-1-1 on Feb. 4 to report the baby boy, less than 1 month old at the time, was "having difficulty breathing."

A lengthy investigation conducted by detectives of the Huron County Sheriff's Office alleged Ryan Welshans was the child's caregiver. Under court order Welshans was to keep his then estranged wife, Stardust Welshans, away from the baby.

Prosecutors claim Ryan Welshans failed to protect the child when he let Stardust into his Bad Axe apartment during the time period when investigators believe the baby sustained a depressed fractured skull, rib fractures, clavicle fractures and other injuries.

The couple gave up their parental rights to both their children in May of 2006. Both children are currently living with foster parents in Huron County and are in the process of being adopted.

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Prosecutor rips chief judge for lowering bond of 'candy man'

Couple accused of keeping drugs within reach of children

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A judge significantly reduced the bond of a Clinton Township couple accused of keeping drugs in candy wrappers and a baby diaper, prompting harsh criticism from the county prosecutor.

Circuit Court Chief Judge Antonio Viviano on Monday lowered bonds for Marvin Jerell Blocker and Tanya Rachelle Humphreys, both 24, from \$300,000 and \$100,000, respectively, to \$50,000 and \$30,000.

The reductions were requested by defense attorney Robert Vitale and were opposed in court by assistant prosecutor William Dailey.

When county Prosecutor Eric Smith learned of the reductions, he contacted The Macomb Daily and castigated Viviano, pointing out that Blocker was free on bond for another drug charge and kept drugs near his five young children.

"This repeat drug dealer wrapped Ecstasy in candy wrappers and cocaine in baby food jars, within easy access of small children," Smith said. "And this judge gives him leniency. What does it take to get this judge's attention?"

Smith said this decision comes on top of Viviano's recent move to name a defense attorney for murder defendant Stephen Grant without relying on the typical list of court-appointed attorneys.

"This judge gives special treatment to Stephen Grant and, now, to the drug-dealing 'candy man,'" Smith said. "This is an outrage. Is there any defendant the judge is willing to hold accountable for his actions?"

Attorney Stephen Rabaut, along with Gail Pamukov, was appointed to represent Grant, 37, of Washington Township, who is accused of murdering his wife, Tara, 34. He faces a May 15 preliminary examination in 42-1 District Court.

Blocker and Humphreys are charged with six counts of drug delivery and one count of child abuse. Police raided their mobile home near Gratiot Avenue and Joy Boulevard on Jan. 31 and allegedly found an undisclosed number of crack rocks wrapped in a baby diaper, 50 Ecstasy pills in "Smarties" candy wrappers, cocaine residue in a baby food jar, one pound of marijuana and prescription drugs. Pills were kept within reach of the children, who were removed by officials and are now living with Blocker's mother, police said.

In arguing to keep the high bond, Dailey noted Blocker's disregard for the welfare his five children, who lived in what Dailey previously said were "horrendous" conditions.

Police found feces from three pit bulls and week-old food. Mattresses were soiled and lacked bedding.

In arguing for the lower bond, Vitale asked the judge to make the amount "reasonable" so the family could post it.

"I've seen less bonds on manslaughter," Vitale said.

He noted that Blocker and Humphreys have "lots of grounding and strong ties to the community," as evidenced by a handful of supporters who attended the hearing.

A pretrial hearing was set for April 25.

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http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/032807/loc_lowbond001.shtml

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The Daily Telegram

[Print Page](#)**WEDNESDAY MARCH 28, 2007** Last modified: *Tuesday, March 27, 2007 4:05 PM EDT*

Hearing delayed in child abuse case; police say investigation continues

Police say they are still receiving calls from potential victims and are seeking warrants for 27 more charges.

By [Dennis Pelham](#)

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN — Child care center operator Douglas Jay Clark shielded his face from television cameras during a brief appearance Monday afternoon in Lenawee County District Court for a hearing on 44 felony counts of sexually molesting three infants at his business since 2004.

The hearing was continued by Judge Natalia M. Koselka until April 20 at the request of public defender John Glaser. He said he received a lengthy police report on the investigation on Friday and has not had time to go through it closely and prepare to question witnesses. Glaser was assigned to the case when Clark was arraigned March 12 on a single count of first-degree criminal sexual conduct. Another 43 counts were added two days later.

Adrian police began an investigation of the 52-year-old owner of Guardian Family Daycare on March 9 after a parent reported suspicious activity. Police obtained a warrant to search the home-based day care center at 1013 Erie St. and reported finding videotapes that showed Clark molesting young children. A computer seized from the home is also being evaluated.

Detective Vincent Emrick said Monday he requested warrants from the Lenawee County prosecutor's office for 27 more criminal sexual conduct charges involving another victim. The investigation is continuing and could yield more charges involving other victims, he said.

Dearborn attorney Courtney Morgan was present for Monday's hearing in district court, representing some of the alleged victims in the case.

"We have been asked to investigate the situation on behalf of certain injured parties," Morgan said. He said he could not comment at this time on potential civil litigation that might grow out of the criminal child sex abuse case.

Adrian Police Chief Terry Collins said detectives have a lot of work to do yet in determining how many victims there have been during the years Clark has been in the child daycare business in Adrian. Clark first obtained a license from the Michigan Department of Human Services in 2002, but police said they believe he was providing child care services for a decade before then. Clark's state license was last renewed in 2005.

Since Clark's arrest police have received calls from a number of people claiming they were victims or knew of others being abused. Some of the claims date back 10 years or more.



HEARING POSTPONED: Douglas Jay Clark, center, the former Adrian child care center operator accused of sexually molesting children in his care, arrives in Lenawee County District Court on Monday. -- Telegram photo by Mike Calamungi

Detective Sgt. Lynn Courington said two complaints were made to Adrian police about Clark in 2003 but they did not result in any charges being authorized by prosecutors. One complaint was withdrawn by a family, he said. The second case was closed for lack of evidence.

Collins said the police department is still receiving calls from potential victims and witnesses, two weeks after Clark's arrest was publicized. At this point, he said, investigators cannot say how many victims there are. People are still being interviewed, he said, and each interview could lead to more people who may have been abused.

"We're hoping that at some point we'll be able to come up with a finite number, or at least estimate a finite number," Collins said.

Clark remains in the Lenawee County Jail where he has been held in lieu of a \$5 million bond set shortly after his arrest.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--



Assault suspect may have abused many kids

Wednesday, March 28, 2007

By Theresa D. McClellan

The Grand Rapids Press

WYOMING -- A Wyoming man accused of sexually assaulting a minor is suspected of abusing at least 13 other children.

Jamie Andrew VanKlaveren, 26, was slated for a preliminary hearing today in Wyoming District Court. He is charged with first-degree criminal sexual conduct involving a 13-year-old who told his mother the assaults had been going on for three years and several of his friends were abused, police said.

Wyoming investigators contacted other boys, ages 10 to 14, some of whom are friends of the victim. All relayed similar stories, Lt. Paul Robinson said.

"This is certainly a case that lends itself to looking at him as a legitimate predator," Robinson said.

The investigation began March 14 when the 13-year-old told his mother VanKlaveren had been abusing him and his friends. The boys told police VanKlaveren would give them food, rent videos for them and have sleepovers.

Robinson said they did not publicize the investigation earlier "because we were trying to find victims."

He said more victims may come forward.

VanKlaveren, who also faces a sex assault charge involving a minor from 2006, has denied the most recent allegations, police said. He remains in the Kent County Jail.

Police say they have four alleged victims in Wyoming; two in Kentwood; four elsewhere in Kent County and four in Allegan County, where VanKlaveren also has lived.

"When they are accomplished predators and have a methodology that is successful and there is a certain degree of embarrassment, these ... pedophiles are very, very good at making them (alleged victims) believe they will be to blame," Robinson said.

Robinson said many of the alleged victims knew one another.

"The odds of them all having the same story is farfetched," he said.

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Michigan report

March 27, 2007

AUDIT: D.H.S. NEEDS TO IMPROVE EVALUATIONS OF TRAINING PROGRAMS

The Department of Human Services needs to improve the way it evaluates its training programs and how it administers the training and staff development functions, a performance audit by Auditor General Thomas McTavish released Tuesday found. The department says it is working on addressing the concerns identified in the audit.

The audit, which was conducted from March 2002 to September 2006 and looked at records from October 1999 through August 2006 concluded that DHS is only moderately effective and efficient in administering the training and staff development functions. According to the audit, DHS hasn't implemented instruction requirements for new family independence specialists and eligibility specialists and also hasn't required continuing education for all services specialists, family independence specialists and eligibility specialists.

According to the audit, a lack of initial instruction and continuing education requirements limited DHS's assurance that service specialists, family independent specialists and eligibility specialists have the skills necessary for their jobs. Continuing education helps give a staff additional skills and knowledge, the audit also states. From February 2004 to February 2006, 90 percent of adult service staff and 46 percent of eligible specialists weren't participating in continuing education.

DHS states in the audit that after January 2007 all newly hired family independence specialists and eligibility specialists will be required to attend initial instruction and that all services specialists, family independence specialists and eligibility specialties should be receiving continuing education training. DHS will also work to improve documentation so as to demonstrate that staff is attending such training.

The audit also concluded that DHS is effective at making sure protective service workers meet the bachelor's degree requirement and didn't include any reportable conditions.

The audit also claims that DHS hasn't instituted a monitoring process to make sure contracted private agency staff providing adoptions services received all their required training. DHS also isn't making sure contracted private agency staff providing foster care and Families First of Michigan services attended all required training. According to the audit, 21 percent of the 19 private agency staff providing adoption services didn't attend all of the required training within six months of being hired as required by the department.

DHS must work to institute a monitoring process to make sure contracted private agency staff providing adoption services and foster care services have all the required training, the audit states.

In its initial response in the audit, DHS said it is creating a corrective action plan to make sure private agency staff completes training.

The audit also found problems with how DHS evaluated its training programs, stating that it hasn't developed a comprehensive procedure to evaluate the effectiveness of its training programs for services specialists. The audit also claims that because of this it has limited assurance that the staff had the chance to develop the skills to make consistent and accurate decisions in their jobs. DHS also hasn't fully identified the current and future training needs of its service specialists and didn't document training needs based on state performance issues, changes to state policy or federal mandates. DHS also frequently didn't make follow up contact with the specialists or their supervisors to see if the training was effective.

DHS responded in the audit that a comprehensive evaluation process for training programs is something they are working on. Maureen Sorbet, spokesperson for DHS, said they make appropriate changes whenever indicated and that's what they were doing with this audit. DHS has 60 days to file a formal response.

DHS Training Programs Need Work

MIRS, March 27, 2007

The Department of Human Services needs to tighten its training programs for certain new employees, according to an Auditor General report released today.

The Auditor General completed a report on the DHS Office of Professional Development, the Office of Training and Staff Development and the Office of Child Support and found the DHS efforts at staff training moderately effective.

According to the audit, the DHS has not instituted instruction requirements for newly hired Family Independence Specialists (FIS) and Eligibility Specialists (ES). The Auditor suggested the DHS institute these programs. It also recommended the DHS develop a comprehensive process to evaluate the effectiveness of its training program.



Child care worth state investment

March 28, 2007

A new national study of child care centers underscores why, even in the midst of Michigan's economic downturn, Gov. Jennifer Granholm must continue efforts to strengthen early childhood education.

Researchers with the National Institutes of Health report that children with access to high quality child care before kindergarten have a higher-level vocabulary in the fifth grade compared with other students who had access to lower quality care.

Surprisingly, the study also concluded that the more time a child spent in child care the more likely their sixth-grade teacher would be to eventually report the child as "disobedient in school."

The research was based on analysis of 1,364 children from 10 states. No Michigan children were in the study, but state policymakers should still view the research as another strong indicator of the importance of exposing as many young children as possible to quality care.

The state's ultimate goal of producing more educated citizens has to begin here, a goal Granholm has been pressing since her first term. The governor has put a number of beneficial building blocks in place, starting with Project Great Start, an effort to boost the academic achievement of day care workers. Day care centers in Michigan are also required as part of their licensing process to read to children at least 30 minutes a day.

Those are vital beginnings that ought to be built upon through such policy changes as increasing the number of Pre-K programs in public school districts, and even the more radical step of offering free preschool to every young child.

But for now, it's at least gratifying to know that Granholm's push for a statewide focus on quality early childhood education is well founded.

Read more about the study at www.nichd.nih.gov/research/supported/seccyd/overview.cfm.

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Take a closer look at parents who don't pay support

Wednesday, March 28, 2007

By Wendy R. Black

I am writing in response to Darrick Scott-Farnsworth's letter on March 1 regarding the reduction of Friend of the Court to save funds.

His suggestion -- to adopt a presumption of a joint physical custody law that would allow both parents to spend substantial time supporting and raising their children -- is not feasible for several reasons, the most important of which is that not all parents are capable of responsibly raising their children on a full-time basis.

If these parents won't be responsible enough to pay to support their own children, what makes you think they would assume the full responsibility of raising that child?

I would suggest that non-payment of child support be considered a felony, as it constitutes child neglect/abuse. Furthermore, there are many non-paying parents who still receive full rights to visitation with their children as, according to FOC guidelines, non-payment does not affect the parent's right to be with their child. Strip those parents of their "right" to be with their child and they might consider being more responsible in helping to financially support those children.

As a custodial parent, I have no choice but to support my child.

Non-paying parents may be self-employed so there is no way to garnish wages. Some non-paying parents don't pay taxes so there is no way to put a lien on unfiled claims. Some non-paying parents are disabled and do not have to pay support.

I totally agree with Mr. Scott-Farnsworth -- eliminate welfare benefits for those fully capable of working to earn a living. It would not only make available those benefits to be used for people who truly need temporary help, but would also take away the ability of men to live off of the women and children who get state aid -- paid for by the rest of us who work for a living and support our children.

It would be wonderful if all parents were responsible, but that simply is not the case. For those parents who are not, I submit that they be held accountable by law for abandoning/neglecting their responsibility and children and lose their rights as parents if they refuse to accept that responsibility.

Parents raise children not money, Mr. Scott-Farnsworth? Habitual welfare parents "have children to raise money," so they don't have to work and our great state allows it.

Perhaps Gov. Jennifer Granholm should focus on those "funds" to improve our state's economy instead of taxing the working poor to death. It is time we speak out. But will anyone listen?

Wendy R. Black resides in the Decatur area.

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March 28, 2007

Detroit

Judge to tackle abuse cases

36th District's move to take on domestic violence docket will hold violators accountable, advocates say.

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- One of Michigan's busiest district courts will soon have a judge who will specialize in domestic violence cases, a move that advocates say will hold abusers more accountable and keep victims safer.

Starting Monday, Detroit domestic violence cases in 36th District Court will be assigned to Judge Ruth Carter to ensure that the thousands of cases in that court annually receive justice swiftly and uniformly.

Carter, a former longtime Wayne County prosecutor who was appointed to the 36th District in 2006, volunteered for the docket.

Though the idea of a domestic violence docket has been considered for months, Chief Judge Marilyn Atkins said it comes on the heels of a Detroit News report last week that domestic violence fatalities in Michigan jumped 74 percent between 2004 and 2005.

"We're right on time with the creation of this," Atkins said. "We have hard and fast statistics that show that there are too many victims."

Advocates are thrilled, saying the domestic violence docket will not allow cases to fall through the cracks.

"This is a great step in eradicating domestic violence in the community," said Larmender Davis, chief executive officer of Serenity Services, a Detroit organization that serves domestic violence victims.

Until now, domestic violence cases -- which typically involve assault crimes -- have been lumped in with other cases at 36th District Court. Sometimes, they weren't prosecuted because they came before judges who either didn't understand the dynamics of domestic violence or didn't take it seriously, Davis said.

The 36th District Court domestic violence docket is being created as domestic violence assault cases have been steadily increasing in Wayne County -- from 2,166 in 2004 to 2,681 in 2006.

"These cases really require some special expertise and focus and consistency," said Nancy Diehl, chief of the felony trial division in the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office.

Thirteen other Michigan district courts also have special ways of handling domestic violence, according to the State Court Administrator's Office.

Anyone arrested for domestic violence in Waterford gets arraigned and a pretrial hearing in 51st District Court within seven days. Before the specialized docket, nearly a month could elapse before accused abusers might have their cases heard.

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Port Huron Times Herald

March 28, 2007

EOC enrolling kids for Head Start program

The Economic Opportunity Committee of St. Clair County is enrolling 3- and 4-year-olds for its 2007-08 Head Start program. Students will learn High Scope curriculum, phonics, art, math, social skills and science. Busing is available in most areas. Parents who meet certain criteria, including receiving assistance from the Department of Human Services, Social Security Insurance or are homeless, may have children who qualify for the program. For details, call (810) 374-9466 or (810) 985-8541.

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Teen girl violence spikes in area

Updated: March 27, 2007 05:29 PM EDT

By EMILY ZANGARO

GRAND RAPIDS - Teen girl violence spiked in the city, and other areas are struggling with the same problem.

The problems in Grand Rapids are part of a bigger trend. Just this month, police have responded to six violent girl incidents - including the incident Sunday that culminated with shots being fired.

At the women's crisis center Every Woman's Place in Muskegon, they've had a 100 percent increase in the number of teens ordered by the courts to anger-management classes. They've seen a dramatic increase in the violence with teenage girls. Part of it is gang related.

"You primarily don't hear too much about female gangs," said prevention coordinator Willie Wilson, "but we are seeing more females come through with some type of gang affiliation."

Every Woman's Place receives referrals from juvenile court and the Department of Human Services dealing with violence.

The problem is larger than gangs. Other factors include family problems and dating. Muskegon is working with area schools and families to get to the core of the problem.



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THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

Michigan offers refuges for unwanted newborns

Tuesday, March 27, 2007

BY MEGAN BROWN

News Staff Reporter

In the six years since Michigan's Safe

Haven law was enacted, at least 44 newborns statewide have been handed over to authorities by mothers who couldn't or didn't want to care for them.

The law, which allows parents to turn over an infant within 72 hours of birth to an on-duty employee of a police station, fire station or hospital without facing criminal charges, could have been an option for the mother of the baby boy whose body was found last week outside an Ypsilanti Township motel, officials say.

"A mother could feel safe choosing this

option," said Kara Gavin, University of Michigan Health System spokeswoman. The health system has been involved with at least one such birth, Gavin said.

The body of the baby boy, the umbilical cord still attached, was found wrapped in a bundle of clothing and bags under a tree near the Motel Manor on East Michigan Avenue on March 19. A medical examiner determined the baby was alive when he was born but could not say how long he lived or whether he was alive when left under the tree.

The governor has proclaimed April 10 as Safe Delivery of Newborns Day, to make the public better aware of the law, which took effect on Jan. 1, 2001. There have been two surrenders in Washtenaw County - one in 2003 and another 2005 - according to statistics from Michigan's Department of Human Services.

When an infant is left with an emergency service provider, the official is obligated under the law to inform the mother of her rights and to encourage her to provide health information that could benefit the child.

The baby's health is immediately checked and a social worker is contacted. If evidence of neglect or abuse is found, Child Protective Services is notified. Since the law's enactment, some surrenders have been complicated when newborns tested positive for drugs. If no foul play is detected, the infant is turned over for adoption.

Catholic Social Services of Washtenaw County has been involved in three safe delivery adoptions since 2006, said Elly Falit, an adoption counselor.

"Lately, what's been happening is women have been giving birth in a hospital and leave the baby in the hospital," Falit said. Parents have 28 days to petition for the return of the child.

Forty-seven states provide safe haven laws for the surrender of a newborn. Alaska, Hawaii and Nebraska do not protect parents who leave their newborns with an emergency service provider.

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Find tax relief for state's poor

March 28, 2007

Until Michigan's new earned income tax credit kicks in next year, this state remains among the harshest in the nation in the way it treats its working poor. According to an annual report by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, only four other states in 2006 had a lower threshold than Michigan's at which families began paying income tax.

The earned income tax credit, long a goal not just of many Democrats but also of social justice advocates, passed late last summer. In 2008, the refundable credit will equal 10% of the federal earned income tax credit; in 2009, the state credit rises to 20% of the federal credit.

That leaves the 2007 tax year with Michigan continuing to tax its poorest working families -- a number estimated at 660,000 when Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed the bill last September. The lesson here is that if lawmakers ultimately decide they need to raise the Michigan income tax to get the state budget under control, they need to take the lowest-earning households into account. They could, for example, advance the effective date of the new credit to give these folks a break.

Even the poorest families can't dodge most of the state's other taxes, from the sales tax to fees on utility and phone bills to the gas tax. They're hardly getting a free ride, and many of them are working hard to stay afloat plus going without health insurance. Any upcoming tax changes must take them into account.

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Work For Welfare Bill Moves

MIRS, March 27, 2007

Today, on a 107-0 vote, the House passed **HB 4482**, legislation that would specify that after the Department of Human Services has made an initial determination that an adult or child aged 16 or over who is not attending school full-time might be eligible for assistance (and is not exempt from Work First participation), that individual would be required to participate in assigned work-related activities.

Under **HB 4482**, which is sponsored by Rep. Brenda **CLACK** (D-Flint), DHS, the individual, and a Work First representative would develop the family's self-sufficiency plan. If an applicant who is not exempt from Work First participation fails to cooperate with Work First, the family would be ineligible for family independence assistance. The bill also would clarify that the department would be required to impose penalties, under Section 57g, if a recipient fails to comply with any Work First requirements as stated in the act.

The bill would also rewrite the provision regarding orientation sessions held by DHS and the Department of Labor and Economic Growth (DLEG). The act currently requires the departments to conduct joint orientation sessions at least weekly. The bill would say DHS or DLEG may conduct weekly orientation sessions. Language that an applicant need participate in work-related activities only after completing an orientation would be eliminated.



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News Release

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Michigan Department of Human Services Summarily Suspends the Group Day Care Home License, #DG630279912, of Alanda Knox

March 28, 2007

The Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Children and Adult Licensing (OCAL) issued an order of summary suspension and notice of intent to revoke the license of Oakland County group day care home provider Alanda Knox, 30450 Rock Creek Drive, Southfield, Michigan. This action resulted from a recent investigation of a complaint of the child day care group home.

The March 26, 2007 complaint investigation found violations of the Child Care Organizations Act and administrative rules regarding supervision and household member suitability. OCAL took emergency action to protect the health, welfare, and safety of children.

Effective 6:00 p.m., March 27, 2007, the Summary Suspension Order prohibits Alanda Knox from operating a group day care home at 30450 Rock Creek Drive, Southfield, Michigan or at any other address or location. Accordingly, she may not accept children for care after that date and time. The order also requires Ms. Knox to inform all of the parents of children in her care that her license has been suspended and that she can no longer provide day care.

Ms. Knox has held a license to operate a group day care home since October 3, 2003. The license was for twelve children.

Michigan law defines a group day care home as a private home in which more than six but not more than 12 minor children are given care and supervision for periods of less than 24 hours a day, unattended by a parent or legal guardian, except children related to an adult member of the family by blood, marriage, or adoption. Group day care home includes a home that gives care to an unrelated minor child for more than four weeks during a calendar year.

For more information, consult DHS Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs.